THE COLLECTOR.

A STUDY OF THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE COLLECTOR OF BRIC-A-BRAC AND THE COLLECTOR OF BOOKS.

London, July 19.

The English papers record without remark the fact that the Magniac "Library" was sold at Christie's on Saturday for $800. The Magniac collection of bric-a-brac had been previously dispersed by the same auctioneers, the total realized being just over half a million dollars. It is the familiar proportion: the pennyworth of bread to the intolerable deal of sack. Earlier in the century the proportions might have been reversed. Then, and in the last century as well, the fashion ran to the collection of books, or, as the phrase was, forming a library. Now the fashion is for pictures, furniture, porcelain, snuffboxes, old plate, and what are called objects of art in general.

The late Mr. Hollingworth Magniac may or may not have been a reading man. Between the collection of books and the reading of them, there is known to be a difference. But it is quite obvious that he cared nothing for books as books; and did not collect them as he collected enamels and ormolu. A book to him was not a beautiful thing in itself; not an object of art; not a treasure to be coveted and acquired. He belonged to the happy period when it was still possible for the lover of fine things to buy them at a reasonable price. He paid, for example, in 1842, just short of $500 for the Henri Deux ewer which has now been sold for $20,000. Very likely the lesser sum was then thought a large price. Henri Deux ware is not a very lovely type of faience; its value consists in its extraordinary rarity, in the difficulty of the process, and in a kind of factitious celebrity which has somehow connected itself with the ware, the true name of which is probably Faience d'Oiron. This is one of those delusive examples which tend to foster in the breast of the amateur the notion that collecting is a form of investment. It may be; it more often turns out a speculation and a failure.

Whatever it be, Mr. Magniac drew the line at books, and it would be interesting to know why he did, and why so many others of his kind do the same. Fashion is not quite a sufficient explanation of such an eccentricity. Many a man is independent of those dictates of others which are summed up under that name. Many a man buys what he likes, not what other people like. If he does the latter, he buys possibly on a rising market; too often a market that has touched high water and begun to fall. There is no necessary connection between the enjoyment of beautiful things for their own sakes, and the kind of enjoyment a man has in thinking he has bought them cheap, and may some day sell them dear. The pleasure of possession and the pleasure of ostentation are also unlike. The pride of showing one's treasures is innocent enough, but again I say, the man who really justifies his passion is the man to whom the beauty or other desirable quality of his acquisitions is the first, and not the second, consideration. Such a man would perhaps value art whether it took the form of a picture, or of an engraving, or of an illustration to a book. Why, therefore, should he so often care so little for books?

It is distressingly notorious that, in these days, he often does not. If you can get access to houses in which famous collections recently formed are enshrined, you will certainly be struck by the inferiority of the library to everything else. I don't say there are no exceptions, but this is the rule; as it was the rule with Mr. Hollingworth Magniac. The $800 for books to the $500,000 for bric-a-brac may be an extreme instance; it is not solitary. It could be matched in more than one famous house of the present day. One might be named in the building of which, the park included, not less than $5,000,000 have been spent, and on the contents as much more. Almost everything is admirable and splendid except the library, and the library would perhaps fetch at Christie's, not Sotheby's, about as much as the Magniac library.

A man who will not look at a picture unless it be a masterpiece; who would not tolerate a cup by anybody but Cellini; whose tapestries are signed by Boucher; for whose interiors half a dozen French chateaus have been stripped, contents himself with the commonest editions of the commonest books, in bindings which are not bindings, and in a condition which would make the rarest volume valueless; or valueless to anybody but Mr. Quaritch. Why?

The interest in books implies, no doubt, a special education: a particular kind of culture; but so does the interest in pictures. The late Sir Richard Wallace said he had rather study a picture than a book at any time. So did the Lord Hertford to whose accumulations he succeeded. There is such a thing as a mania for paintings, and such a thing as a mania for books. Lord Hertford's rooms in Paris were not merely hung with pictures, they were warehouses; the pictures, almost all of them fine, stood on the floor, three and four deep, about the walls. If he wanted to look at one, or to show you one, he had to exhume it, turn it round, turn it right side up sometimes; drag it to the light.

Heber's books—his libraries rather—are a still better known instance. He had a dozen or more; several in England, several in Holland, Germany, and elsewhere. He bought libraries he had never seen, and, I believe, never saw some of them to the day of his death. He had many copies of the same edition of the same book in the same state. He often did not know where any one of them was, and, if he wanted to consult the book, bought still another copy; which, in its turn, presently became swallowed up in this great sea of printed matter.

Yet nobody ever doubted that Lord Hertford cared for pictures, or that Heber cared for books. It is idle to lay down general rules, or to try to extract one from the hundreds of facts that might be cited. Each man cares in his own way, or perhaps does not care. It is known that the present Lord Spencer does not care for the splendid library of which he is the custodian at Althorp. The fact has been stated here in print and may, therefore, be stated again. It implies no reproach upon Lord Spencer, and it forms, I imagine, no part of the body of reasons which have induced him to resolve to part with this library. He is keenly sensible of the lustre which the possession of so magnificent a collection confers upon him and upon his family. It happens that the bibliographical taste is wanting to him, just as it is wanting to many scholars, to whom a book is only a tool.

This, I admit, does not help us much in our search for an answer to the question we started with, nor explain why the millionaire, who insists on splendor in other matters, should put up with what is merely squalid in his library. Not all of them do. The millionaire has become as formidable in the book shops and book auction-rooms as he is in the picture market. He is, however, less numerous than his comrades who invest fortunes in painted canvas and Marie Antoinette writing tables. He occurs less frequently, and I always suspected he was looked upon by these others as an inferior order of enthusiast.

Not many of the most celebrated cabinets of modern times, unless it be in America, have been formed by very rich men. The most precious in France, which is pre-eminently the home of the book collector, have been brought together, with one exception, by men of moderate fortune. Neither M. Quentin Bauchart nor M. Eugene Paillet, nor M. Beraldi, would be counted in the first flight at Minneapolis. The late Baron James de Rothschild might have held up his head, even among the moneyed magnates of the Far West of America, and so might the Duc d'Aumale. I did not reckon him one of the exceptions, because the Chantilly library is not, I think, entirely of his forming, and because a king's son is, after all, somewhat removed from the competition in which ordinary mortals jostle each other, whether on the Bourse, or in the Hotel Drouot, or in the Passage des Panoramas.

I am loath to answer my question in a way which suggests a low view of human nature, and I will preface it by saying that, if it suggests a low view at all, it is of individuals and not of the species. What I mean is that to one whose tastes have not led him all his life to live among books, they may well enough seem to offer less opportunity for ostentation than do pictures and furniture. Or I will put it in another way. The eye falls readily on the picture, on the tapestry, on a luxurious interior as a whole. Books, indeed, may be decorative; hardly any scheme of color is more delicate or richer than masses of old bindings with the softened splendor of the gold and the morocco which the gold sets off. But the decoration of a room is not their primary object; it is incidental. The book must be sought out, opened, studied, before its true beauty is discoverable. So, if we put these two reasons together and consider that, after all, the newly rich man does sometimes like his riches to be readily seen, and then that, having a busy life, he himself prefers such objects of art as are to be enjoyed most easily and constantly we may, perhaps, get somewhere near the truth. Most social questions involve a study of human nature: that is the book which must be opened before we perceive why Mr. Magniac's $800 worth of volumes contented him, while it took half a million to satisfy his other and perhaps not less delicate tastes.

G. W. S.

TOPICS IN PARIS.

RUSSIA AND FRANCE AT THE NATIONAL FETE—THE DEATH OF MADAME MIRES.

Paris, July 15.

Yesterday was the coldest and darkest Fourteenth of July we have had for many a year. Except, however, for an occasional ten minutes' drizzle the weather held up the whole afternoon and evening, and the National fete passed off very well after all. The cold weather had its advantages. It was a distinct boon to the 25,000 soldiers who make up the garrison of the capital, and to whom an afternoon's march to the reviewing grounds of Longchamps and back on a hot day is often a very trying duty. Owing to the doubtful state of the weather, there were fewer brilliant toilettes in the tribunes, and there was less glitter of helmets on the field; but, on the other hand, there were no cases of sunstroke or exhaustion, of which on other years there is often such a distressingly long list. The review was timed for 3 o'clock, and M. Carnot, remembering the old French saying that punctuality is a regal virtue, drove up exactly as 3 o'clock was striking. The democratic simplicity of his plain black clothes contrasted strongly with the brilliant uniforms of the French generals and the foreign attaches. The only exterior sign of rank he wore was the grand cordon of the Legion of Honor. The President was greeted with cheers all along the way from Paris, and with applause from the official tribunes, where cheering would have been thought perhaps a trifle familiar. Beside him sat Baron Mohrenheim, the Russian Ambassador, an elderly man of stooping figure, who is very lively and talkative. M. Carnot listened to him the whole afternoon with great deference, nodding and smiling, and occasionally putting in a word with the greatest possible discretion. Next to the President and General Saussier, the commander of the forces, who would be commander-in-chief in time of war, Baron Mohrenheim, whose numberless decorations mark him out to view, was the most conspicuous figure. This is due to his having been instrumental in bringing about the Franco-Russian understanding, of which Frenchmen are so proud. Signs of this were not wanting yesterday in Paris. The Republican character of the fete was really in the background. The Republic is no longer questioned, and it therefore does not need asserting. The novelty of yesterday's fete was the evidence it gave of the Franco-Russian friendship. There was not a house without the Russian flag; not an open air concert but played the Russian hymn twenty times over, not a cheap-jack but sold hundreds of cockades with the colors of the two nations.

The death of Madame Mires at the age of eighty reminds us of the cruel rivalry that used to prevail between the late Baron James de Rothschild and other Frenchified Jews from Germany, and their brethren of Portuguese origin. The latter set up to be the aristocrats of the race; an assumption that the others refused to admit, the Jews being and having been from the beginning an equality-loving people. The Sephardim, or Jews of Portuguese ancestry, who were then most prominent in Paris, were idealists compared with the German ones, though as musicians the latter soared high above them.

The most bitter jealousy was excited in the Rothschild set by the Imperial favor in which the Sephardim Jews basked. If the latter had kept the primacy, Drumont, I believe, could never have come forward as an anti-Semite. Mires, who was one of this aristocracy and the husband of the lady who has just died, did not, however, set up to be a seer or a humanitarian. He came from Bordeaux, bringing with him a beautiful young wife, from whom his co-religionists for divers reasons stood aloof. She was said to have been a laundress. The pair made the journey in company with Moses Millaud. Some years later he and Mires founded "Le Petit Journal." As they were Bordelais, the Pereires took them by the hand, and, being in a fever to cover the earth with canals and railways, threw chances in the way of Mires which he did not lose. He was a little great man, indeed, a dwarf born to slay giants, and finally to be bowled over by the greatest financial giant of his time, the late Baron James de Rothschild. Mires had a prodigious imagination that ran into business combinations. Though not fussy, he was in a fever about whatever he took up, whether it was a Roman railway or Sarah Bernhardt's education.

The wife was a good soul, and she became a devout Catholic. When, somewhere in the fifties, he was pushing forward his Papal railway and other concessions, and enabling Cardinal Antonelli to pile up the millions that he left to his relatives, the ex-laundress became the queen of the Faubourg St. Germain, and had l'embarras de choix when the time came for her to choose an arch aristocrat to be the husband for her only daughter Emilie. The Nuncio and a fortune-teller decided that the choice was to fall on Prince Alphonse de Polignac, son of Charles X's unlucky Minister, and grandson, on his maternal side, of Lord Radcliffe. One hardly ever then heard of French noblemen marrying wealthy Jewesses. A storm of jealousy was raised by the wedding of Emilie Mires, but less among the Gentiles than the German Jews. The ceremony was provokingly ostentatious, and was performed at the Madeleine, after an exhibition had been duly made of the bride's trousseau and jewels, which cost about £25,000. What was most remarkable about it was the collection of high aristocrats, personages who scorned to set foot in the Tuileries from the day Louis Philippe entered that palace. This was thought unendurable. Denunciations against Mires for sharp practice and for swindling rained down on the desks of the Ministry of Justice, and on that of the Emperor's private secretary. The wedding of his daughter brought on his ruin. It appears all so wicked and so childish now that one looks back on the circumstances that led to his persecution. De Persigny having "les vieux partis" on the brain, and looking askance at the Legitimist demonstration into which he thought the bridal was turned, listened too easily to the accusations, and saw in the bride the future hostess of a gilded and highly aristocratic Chambordist salon.

But the worst foe was Baron James de Rothschild, Mires having been the successful rival of the Baron's Neapolitan kindred in obtaining the concession of the Roman railways. There was really no grave charge against Mires, but he had slid into illegalities which the judges chose to treat as felonious. The Emperor was industriously plied with arguments against him by the giant who stood in his path. Courtiers were paid to help to trip him up. To one of them was lent all the money he wanted to buy ground for building in waste places and slums, which the Empress, who was speculating in the same line, had told him were going to be purchased by the city for improvements. By these means this person made a fortune now estimated at nearly $10,000,000.

E. C.

CHINESE FREEMASONARY.

A MYSTERIOUS LEAGUE OF SECRET SOCIETIES AMONG THE CELESTIALS.

Singapore, June 15.

"How high, brother, is this lodge?"

"As high as our eyes can see."

"How broad, brother, is this lodge?"

"As broad as two capitals and thirteen provinces."

These words are a part of the ritual of the organization variously known as the "Tien-Ti" "Heaven and Earth" or "Triad," the greatest of the secret societies of China. They are intended to express the greatness of the society; the first answer meaning, "as high as heaven itself," and the second, "as broad as the world." This is hyperbole, of course. Yet it is also strictest truth. For to the countless members of the "Triad" its laws are supreme authority, both in worldly and in spiritual affairs, so that they really reach up to heaven; while it is also as broad as the world, for it has its members and exerts its sway in every quarter of the globe.

The recent anti-foreign riots and revolutionary movements in China called attention anew to these mysterious organizations, which were charged with responsibility for all the trouble. Doubtless the charge was just. But no effort of the Imperial Government will succeed in suppressing the societies. The Government has been trying to do that for many years; indeed, for centuries. It is a capital crime to belong to the "Triad" in China. Yet that society has more than thirty million members, and is growing in strength and numbers every year. In the Dutch and Spanish settlements the death penalty is prescribed against its members, yet it flourishes. Here in the Straits Settlements, the British Government has made great efforts to crush it. A special law against it was promulgated three years ago, and a special officer, known as the Protector of the Chinese, was charged with the execution of it. What has been the result? The Protector of the Chinese, in his official report, just issued, practically admits the failure of the law. The "Triad" no longer openly exists. But in secret it is as strong as ever. Its spirit, its traditions, survive and flourish, and its members in Singapore are literally innumerable. Last year more than 125,000 Chinese came hither, and it is estimated that more than half of the men were members of the "Triad."

Why is this society interdicted? So far as China itself is concerned, the question is easily answered. It is a treasonable organization. The very object of its foundation and of its existence is to overthrow the present dynasty, which is Manchu-Tartar, and to restore the old, pure Chinese dynasty. It was in 1644 that the Manchu-Tartars gained possession of the Imperial Government. Just thirty years later the "Triad" was founded.

The story of the origin of this society, as told by its adept members, is as follows: The Manchu-Tartar invasion occurred in 1644. Twenty years later, other Tartars, the Eleuths, invaded the Empire and endangered the throne. The Manchu-Tartar Emperor made a desperate appeal to the people for support. A Buddhist priest, of Hok-Kien, named Kim-Tat, organized an army of monks, and drove the Eleuth-Tartars before him. In the very hour of victory, however, Kim-Tat was murdered by a traitor, who so maligned him to the Emperor that the latter ordered all the monks to be slain and their monastery burned. The monks were all slain but five. These five escaped and found refuge in a temple, where they lived for several eyars. One day they ventured out, and were walking along the bank of the Sam-Po River, when they beheld a porcelain tablet miraculously floating on the water. Impelled by an unseen power, it came toward them, and they picked it up. Inscribed upon it they found these words: "Drive out the Cheng; restore the Beng!" that is, "drive out the Manchu-Tartars and restore the native Chinese dynasty." Then the tablet was transformed into a bird and flew away.

The five monks pondered long over the mysterious message. They had accepted the Manchu-Tartar Emperor, and sworn allegiance to him. They had even fought for him and saved him from his Eleuth foes. But had he not slain their leaders and their comrades, and sought to slay them? Even now, were they not outlaws, hiding for their lives? So they decided to obey the command, and to turn against the Emperor who had already turned against them. Thereupon a number of other miracles occurred, confirming and encouraging them in their resolution. Five horse dealers joined their band, and then the holiest hermit in all the Empire. And while these eleven were conspiring, the bird came flying back and lighted among them, and immediately was re-transformed into the porcelain tablet. So they swore their vows over the tablet and adopted its motto as the rule of their lives.

Others now rapidly joined them, until they were able to muster a large army. Guided by the miraculous tablet, they found the true heir to the throne, a grandson of the last native Emperor. They worshipped him as the Son of Heaven, and then marched against the Manchu-Tartar Emperor. Their leader was a giant, named Ban-Lung. At a place called the Mountain of the Phoenix, they met the Imperial army and, after a hard battle, routed it. But their leader, Ban-Lung, was slain, and the tablet-bird, flying to the side of the next in command, Kin Lam, whispered to him that the time for successful revolution had not yet come. Thereupon Kin-Lam called his victorious soldiers about him, and repeated to them the message. Inspired or prompted by the bird, he told them that a secret league must be formed to complete the work they had attempted. So, on that very spot, the "Triad," or "Tien-Ti," was founded. Then they all dispersed to their homes. And the growth of their organization was very rapid. In a few years it comprised millions of members, and dominated the social life of the Empire. The Manchu-Tartar Emperors, knowing its object, have issued decree after decree against it. Death is the penalty for belonging to it, and a very painful death, to boot. This penalty has been dealt out to thousands. Yet, it has not deterred millions from joining the interdicted league. It was, as the world knows, the "Triad" which organized the Taiping rebellion, the greatest war of modern times, in which millions of lives were sacrificed. The magnitude of that struggle shows the "Triad's" power. It would have succeeded then, had it not been for General Gordon, who took command of the Imperial hosts and transformed a beaten, demoralized rabble into the "Ever Victorious Army." But the next time, as members of the "Triad" say, significantly, there will be no General Gordon.

It has been said that there is an intimate connection between the "Triad" and Freemasonry; but the connection exists probably only in the fancy of those who think they have discovered it. In a measure, however, the "Triad" corresponds in Chinese life with Freemasonry in the life of other Nations. There are, too, certain features of its ritual which suggest Freemasonry. Its original pass-word was "Obey Heaven and do Righteousness"; its original aim—professedly—was, to seek light or truth. Its symbol is a triangle. Its meeting-place is called a lodge. The lodge must always be exactly square, standing north and south, east and west. In each wall is a door. The eastern door is the holy one, and over it are two inscriptions. One says: "When one opens, myriads enter." The meaning is that when the Supreme Master of the Order calls upon the Order to rally, its hosts will be innumerable. The other inscription reads: "In the eastern woods it is difficult to walk fast; but the Sun rises in the East." That means that the work of the Order, which is carried on secretly, or "in the woods," must proceed slowly; but sunrise, or ultimate triumph, will come at last, out of that very secrecy, slow-moving though it be. So when a lodge is opened, the master asks each member, "Whence come you"? The member replies, "I come from the East." "When did you come?" "At sunrise, when the East was full of light."

The ceremony of receiving a new member is a curious and interesting one. The candidate, duly vouched for, approaches the outer door of the lodge, clad in white, and with his pig-tail unbraided so that his hair hangs loose upon his shoulders. His name and the place of his birth are recorded, he pays a fee of $3 or $4 and kneels at the door. His guide knocks. The guard within asks who is there. The candidate replies, and begs to be admitted to communion with the Five Ancestors, meaning the five monks who founded the order. This is reported to the Master of the Lodge, who then commands that the guide enter, leaving the candidate still without. The guide enters, prostrates himself before the altar, and undergoes a most extraordinary catechizing. The master, in the name of the Five Ancestors, asks him no less than 333 questions, all of which he answers. Then the master gives him a key, with which to open the door for the worthy candidates, and a sword with which to kill the unworthy. The worthy candidates are admitted. They pass beneath an arch of swords, and then kneel. Each holds a lighted incense-stick in his hands. One by one the thirty-six articles of the oath are read to them, and they swear to obey. At the end of their vow they say: "If I fail to keep these pledges, may the light of my life be extinguished—thus!" So saying, they press the incense-sticks upon the floor, instantly extinguishing the fire.

Other ceremonies follow in different parts of the lodge, in the "Temple of Truth and Justice," and at the gate of the "Willow City." Finally each candidate, in turn, is led before the Master and made to prostrate himself. Eight councillors rest the points of their swords upon his naked shoulders. The Master asks him his name, his birthplace, etc. To the question "Where are your parents?" the candidate must always answer "Dead," thus signifying that henceforth all his worldly ties are sundered. Many other ceremonies follow, and all is at last concluded by each condidate drinking a few drops of blood drawn from his own veins.

Such is this mysterious organization, whose Supreme Master—his identity is unknown to all save a few members—is really a far more potent sovereign than the Emperor himself. The wealth of the society is well-nigh incredible. It has hundreds of millions of dollars in its treasury, ready for use at an hour's notice. Its members have but one object in life, to overthrow the Manchu-Tartars and to restore the native Chinese dynasty. And Tartars and Chinese alike are convinced that when it makes its next great struggle, it will attain its end. "When One opens the Eastern Gate, myriads will come, and the sun will rise."

THE ACTIVITY OF MT. ETNA.

RIVERS OF HOT LAVA WATCHED CALMLY BY THE CATANIA PEASANTS.

Naples, July 16.

Etna, which has often spread terror and devastation over the Plain of Catania, is once more in eruption, threatening the villages and habitations on its slope with destruction. The eruption began on Saturday, and after the first day or two seemed likely to subside. But the latest accounts state it is on the increase, with five craters in a state of activity. Each of them is throwing out a continuous stream of liquid lava several yards deep and very wide, which, seen from below, present the appearance of rivers of fire. These newly-opened craters are daily enlarging. Loud explosions occur continually, and at intervals Catania and the other towns hard by are severely shaken. In spite of many obstacles in its path, the principal lava stream is slowly making its way down the mountain slope. Alarmed at its progress, the authorities have despatched, and to impress upon the inhabitants the wisdom of making their escape from the approaching flood. To stay its progress is beyond the power of science. There is, however, no fear that any such catastrophe as that which overwhelmed Herculaneum and Pompeii will befall any of the many hamlets which cluster around the mountain's base, for Etna is a lava-discharging volcano, not one that, as a rule, vomits forth stones and ashes, which, mixed with a simultaneous eruption of steam, buried the fated cities around Vesuvius. The lava river, though death to the land over which it crawls, is not swift destruction. It may be approached, and even studied day by day, like the vast river of molten rock which, in 1859, flowed for sixty miles from Kilauea, in the Sandwich Islands, until it leaped in fiery cascades into the sea at Wainanali. The mischief is that nothing can survive its visit. The volcanic ashes form in a year or two the most fertile of soils. But generations must elapse before the bleak, black lava crumbles under the wind and weather sufficiently to form soil on which the scantiest crop can root itself. Even then the rock may not have cooled. Eleven months after an eruption of Vesuvius the lava was so hot that a stick thrust into it caught fire, and though, seven years after an eruption of the same volcano, in 1785, lichens were growing on the surface of the streams, the interior was still hot and steaming. It is even affirmed that the lava which flowed out of Etna in 1787 was visibly smoking in 1830, and that eighty-seven years after the great eruption of Jurillo, in Mexico, vapor could be seen rising out of cracks in the lava streams.

The comparative, though by no means invariable immunity from sudden death which is one of the general characteristics of an Etna eruption, may account for the apathy with which many of those who seem to be threatened are regarding the present outburst. Dwellers on the mountain-side—especially those on the southern slope—are naturally deserting their homes for the open country and the towns. But, though a broad current of red-hot lava is now within three miles of Nicolosi, and other streams are coursing toward the east and west, there does not seem to be half the panic which would be aroused by the rumor of cholera being within a day's journey. Directly "Mongibello" is quiescent, the runaways will return home, shrug their shoulders at the sight of their blackened vineyards and burnt up pastures, and begin afresh to build new houses on the very site where history and their own experience tell them is dangerous. Even after the nights become lurid with the light from the fiery stream, the peasants display the utmost reluctance to depart. They compromise matters by sleeping in the fields and invoking all the saints whose names they recall, only seeking safety in flight when the lava is almost upon them. Indeed, were it not for the fatalism inherent in the dash of Saracenic blood which flows through the Sicilian's veins, the country within miles of "the awful peak, Etna's great mouth," would be as desolate as the Roman Campagna. All round and about them the peasants have witness of the former ravages of the volcano. In Catania the houses and churches are built with the very material which has been so frequently its ruin. Nicolosi seems as if it had been enwrapped in lava floods, and for miles and miles around, almost every acre bears evidence of some of the hundred or more eruptions that have been recorded.

The first recorded eruption took place B. C. 480, but long before then the mountain was an object of wonder and awe. It was deep down in its inmost recesses that the Cyclops were fabled to have erected their forges and workshops. Since it was described by Strabo the general aspect of the mountain does not appear to have changed much, but the many eruptions that have occurred since then must have greatly altered the entire surroundings. From time to time new craters have been formed, and during the great eruption of 1669 a chasm twelve miles long opened in the flank of the mountain. The river of lava which issued from this new crater was over two miles broad, and not only encircled Monpilleri, but also destroyed Belpasso, a town of 8,000 inhabitants. Still moving onward, it flowed through the streets of Mascalucia, burning everything in its course. San Pietro, Camporotondo, Misterbianco and fourteen other villages perished before it reached Catania. At Albenella, two miles from that city, it undermined a hill covered with cornfields, and carried it forward, floating until, stayed by the walls of Catania, the lava accumulated to a height of sixty feet, and then, falling in a fiery cascade, overwhelmed that part of the city. In other places it overthrew the ramparts and poured through the streets, never halting until, fifteen miles from the crater, it ran into the sea, after desolating more than forty square miles of country. Since that date there have been many eruptions, but none of equal violence. The present outburst was not unexpected. A new islet rose last winter in the vicinity of Pantelleria, and for several months past there have not been lacking signs that at any moment a disturbance might be looked for.

MIDSUMMER'S CHARMS.

PRAISES FOR THE SEASON BETWEEN BUDDING SPRING AND FRUITFUL FALL.

That man is indeed to be pitied who can only see in midsummer a hot and sizzling season that one must somehow endure between the fresh young beauties of spring and the mature perfection of autumn. In truth, midsummer is not that kind of a season at all, but has a charm and a character of its own that but few understand. As spring represents the newness and vigor of youth, and autumn represents the beauty and fruitage of old age, so midsummer stands for the strength and perfection of mature life. There is nothing sophomoric about midsummer as there is occasionally about spring. And there are no wrinkles on its fair face, as there are on the half-smiling, half-tearful face of autumn. There is neither the crudeness of youth nor the infirmity of old age; but instead the lusty strength which comes with completed growth, and the joyousness of life in its healthy maturity, when the sorrows of infancy are forgotten and the pains of dissolution are as yet in the far-distant future. How perfectly delicious is a midsummer day at its best, when its character and meaning are thus understood! It is hot, may be; but if you are in ordinarily good health you will not mind that. The hotness of a midsummer day is not in itself unpleasant, if you meet it in the right way. Of course if you are compelled to rush around in the city, or it is your sad fate to have to go on an excursion, your condition is indeed a wretched one. Of if you fill yourself up with liquor in order, as you say, to keep cool, the heat of midsummer will seem great indeed. But go to the country and commune with Nature. Wander off to some bosky dell, where you may hear the sweet notes of the woodthrush and the mischievous mewing of the catbird, while through some sunlit vista you may see a field of grain, may be, or of potatoes in bloom, or of waving corn. We will not admit the possibility of your being bitten by mosquitoes, because the particular bosky dell we have in mind never has any mosquitoes, and anyhow these insects are not peculiar to midsummer. While thus sitting in this beautiful woodland temple, you breathe in the subtle smell of the woods and resign your senses to the delicious languor that is in the air. And as you gradually forget all about the great roaring, artificial world from which you have escaped, you begin to get some faint idea of the witching spell of midsummer.

And then the song of the locust! Yes, song; for, though it consists of but one strident note, it somehow or other suggests a whole diapason of joyous content and happiness. No true lover of the country can ever leave the locust out of consideration when calling up his memories of midsummer. It brings up pictures of wavy fields of grain, and the scent of clover, and the gentle soughing of the trees, as the midsummer breeze whispers to them, and the hazy blue hills in the distance, and the rumble of a wagon on the road nearby, and the hum of the bumble-bee, and the cackle of some too industrious hen, and the distant clatter of a reaper, and the gushing song of the bobalink. You remember, too, the days—we will not confess how many days and years have intervened since—when, as a boy, you used to catch the big flying locusts, either to read the mysterious hieroglyphics on their wings, or else to see if they really chewed tobacco, as the boys all said. Certainly midsummer without the grasshopper would be a poor affair.

But some one will object that the vegetation of midsummer is uninteresting. This heresy deserves to be sternly rebuked. It is true, it is not, like spring, the season of bud and blossom. Nor is it, like autumn, except in a few cases, the season of fruit. But it is a mistake that only unobservant people could be guilty of, to say that its vegetation is unworthy of notice. Go to the right place this morning and look at the tiger lilies in bloom. Certainly in their bold and defiant beauty they compare with anything that spring can show. Then consider the Japanese iris, with its aggressive sword-like foliage, so sturdily facing the sun, and with its exquisite flowers, only excelled by the orchid or the bluefiag, belonging to the same family, known and loved by every country-bred boy, or the hollyhock, the phloxes, or the gaillardias, those old-time favorites in the flowerbed of the farmer's wife. The hollyhock alone would vindicate midsummer from the charge made against it. As for the phloxes, they are of pure American ancestry, and should be prized for that reason, even if they were not so handsome. Other noteworthy flowers are the catalpa, with its great spires of pink and white bloom; the linden tree, the perfume of whose blossoms is almost overpowering; the chestnut, whose long catkins make such a striking contrast to the lovely green of its leaves; the wild rose of the pasture field, and the tall eglantine of the hedges; the sweet pea, with its exquisite fragrance, ready to vanish at a touch; the sweet Williams; the yuccas; the sturdy succory; the mulleins, making yellow sheeps' eyes at you from every side of their tall stalk, and the common milkweed of the roadside, whose perfume, though unsung by the poet, is fine enough for the daughter of a king. Time would fail us, indeed, to tell of all the beautiful flowers and shrubs that belong to the season of midsummer—the larkspur, the ox-eyed daisy, the nasturtium, the coreopsis, the honeysuckle, the London Pride, the Oswego tea, the clematis and the Johnswort. Nor should we forget the various kinds of creeping plants, parasites, though they be, which at this season of the year cover so many unsightly trunks and stumps with the delicate tracery of their leaves. Then, too, there is the white blossom of the potato, reminding us of the kitchen garden, which will well repay a visit in midsummer. The small fruits, such as currants and raspberries, need no poet to sing their praises, and every year their merits are becoming more generally recognized. Nor should we forget the new potatoes, or the crook-necked squash, or the delicious sweet corn, or else the leeks and onions and garlic and parsley, that do so much to give a flavor to a season that might otherwise be insipid. The kitchen garden doesn't get much space on the daily papers. A reported war-cloud in the Balkans will crowd out an article about it any day. But it is, nevertheless, one of the crowning glories of midsummer, and it would be a happy thing for everybody, but the marketman, if all householders in the country had one.

And then there are the weeds. Don't turn up your nose; for even weeds are worthy of notice, and, sometimes, of admiration. Some of the rare and expensive exotics in your conservatory, dear sir, or madam, are only weeds in their own country—"pesky," doubtless, the natives call them in their own tongue. Moreover, even the common weeds of the dooryard and the roadside are only common because they are common, to make use of an Hibernicism. You, indeed, may "cuss" them, but botanists discuss them, and see in them beauties that many flowers in the botanical Four Hundred do not possess. It may be admitted that weeds seem to have a desire to grow where they ought not to grow. But that is because we don't give them any proper chance to grow where they ought to grow. Besides, weeds are a blessing in disguise, by stimulating industry, and by forcing us to stir up the ground around our crops, to the great advantage of the same.

However that may be, the weeds are an important feature of midsummer, and illustrate what Nature can do in the way of raising a crop without the help of manual labor or expensive farm implements. The "pusley" plants can manufacture a carpet for a roadside almost in one night. The lusty pigweeds may be a little clammy to the touch, but they are anxious to cultivate the most friendly relations with you, and if you know enough to put them in a pot when they are young and tender, they make "greens" not to be sneezed at. The Roman wormwood springs up as a mute witness of your laziness if you have failed to use your hoe for a week. The yellow dock and the common burdock are not great travellers, but they are constantly on the roadside. The nettle erects a pretty spire of purple bloom, from which the bees seem to get a great deal of honey. In bits of swampy ground, the jewel weed, called by children the snapweed, attracts attention by its watery stem, its orange-colored flowers, but, most of all, by its seedpods, which, when ripe, have a way of bursting open and scattering the seeds as though thrown by a catapult. Thus we might go on with a long catalogue of weeds, not one of which is uninteresting, and many of which appeal to us not only by their beauty, but on account of their old associations, with the dooryard, or barnyard, or roadside of childhood.

Moreover, the vegetation of midsummer is interesting from another point of view. It is a transcript of the tremendous struggle for existence that is always going on in Nature. Every tree, shrub and plant is fighting for its life, often against overwhelming odds. And in this struggle no quarter is given or received. You see it in the pasture field, where a hundred species of plants are striving with might and main, not only to live themselves, but to kill their rivals, and thus fulfil Nature's command to bring forth seed after their kind. And you see it, too, in the forest, where the trees are fighting a Titanic battle with each other, and where the shrubs and smaller growths also are acting the part of guerrillas in the great contest. It is a battle, moreover, in which the victory is never won; for even the king of the forest, which has laid low all its rivals, may be made a helpless captive by some alert and vigorous parasite, which feeds upon its very life. Notice, too, the wondrous persistency of vegetable life. The tender shoot which in the springtime just managed to peep through a stony cleft, has continued to flourish, until now it has enlarged the cleft which it had made its home, and is preparing to disintegrate a whole stratum of rock. What is the meaning of this mysterious and all-conquering energy? And whence comes this Power, which so wondrously veils itself behind the apparently gentle processes of Nature?

"Verily," exclaimed the old Hebrew seer, "Thou art a God that hidest Thyself," and it is a truth that comes strongly home to every one who observes at all carefully the unceasing activity of Nature as shown in the vegetation of midsummer. The grand epic of life is not for a moment interrupted by the continuous tragedy of death, but moves in stately measure to some far off good which is completely hidden from our view by the clouds that surround Omnipotence.

But in thinking of the earth, do not let us forget the sky in midsummer, for it is well worth our attention. Huge billows of cumulous clouds are one of its characteristics, and they are constantly shaping themselves into the most fantastic forms of beauty. Anon, the black thunder heads arise with threatening mien, and sometimes all these stage properties of the heavens disappear, in order to reveal to us a sky of brassy hue, which, in turn, melts into the most translucent blue. Seen through the waving foliage of some tree, whose shade you are enjoying, with the sounds of country life lulling you to repose, what dreams may come to you as you behold this ever changing panorama of the universe! You may not be a poet, but you feel such thoughts as come to the mind of the poet, as he speaks of falling

> Upon the great world's altar stairs
> That slope thro' darkness up to God.

We end as we began. Midsummer is the triumph of maturity, the apotheosis of lusty, exuberant life, with a beauty, variety and suggestiveness all its own, that appeal with telling force to all who care to study it. It is nature's promissory note on which she affixed her floral seal in the spring, and which will come to maturity in the golden fruitage of autumn.

A STRANGE SAVAGE TRIBE.

CRUEL INHABITANTS OF AN ISLAND IN THE MEXICAN GULF.

Los Angeles, July 19.—It is a curious fact that Mexico possesses an island in the Gulf of California only a couple of miles from the mainland of the State of Sonora, and not over thirty miles from Hermosillo, the capital of the State, over which the National or State authorities exercise no authority, which has never been thoroughly explored, and which is inhabited by a race of Indians totally unlike any other tribe of aborigines in that part of the world. Frank Oakley, who was for some years a resident of the Guaymas and other Mexican places on the Gulf, is in Los Angeles, and from him I have gleaned some facts about this wretched little bit of savagedom, and its more wretched inhabitants, which will be of interest, not only in themselves, but in the light they throw on Mexico's indifference to its wards, though in view of the condition of many of our own Indians, perhaps the less said about that the better. The island is called Tiburon, which means "the shark," a very appropriate title when all its features are understood. Its exact location is between the 28th and 29th degrees of latitude and the 34th degree of longitude.

"The island is not large," said Mr. Oakley, "its extreme length being about twenty miles, and its greatest width something like twelve miles. It lies off the coast of Sonora separated from the mainland by a strait only two or three miles wide. Taking it as the crow flies, it is only about thirty miles from the city of Hermosillo. It is inhabited by a tribe of Indians of which less is known, perhaps, than of the Fuegians of the Southern Continent, and who are fully as low in the social scale, though not as repulsive in features as the latter.

"Nothwithstanding the short distance which separates these Indians, who are called Ceris, from the mainland, the inhabitants of that State know next to nothing about them, and their island has never been thoroughly explored on account of their hostility to visitors. I have seen parties of them occasionally at Hermosillo, and a suburb of that city is called after them Pueblo de Ceris.

"The island is in appearance most uninviting. It is mountainous and barren, its flora suggestive of its people, as it consists chiefly of cacti of the tuna and pitaza class which produce "prickly pears"—"besnagas," which by Arizonians in the desert are called "niggerheads"—they are thick, round cacti growing to the size of five-gallon keys—mesquit bushes, greasewood and stuntwood trees. In a few of the valleys, however, it is said that sycamores grow and some grass is to be found.

"Jack-rabbits, quail and rattlesnakes appear like the Ceris to be natives of the island, and burros, a few cattle and a great many dogs have been imported by the Indians as a result of their raids into Sonora. No one knows how many Indians their are on the island; but there are not thougat to be over 500, and there won't be that many very long, as they are dying out. They live on fish principally, and do not hesitate to eat those which have been cast up on the sands by the sea, even if they are more or less decayed. They will also eat most any kind of animal, not being particular whether it was killed for that purpose or not. Some few years ago they were very hostile, and would not allow any one to land on the island, not even as yet, no exploring party has ventured to go any distance inland, so forbidding are they and so treacherous. They would cross to the mainland occasionally and make forays on the ranches, but the rurales punished them severely several times, and of late they have maintained a sullen sort of good behavior. The Mexicans have only one naval vessel on this coast, you know, the Democrata she is called, a small rickety wooden steamer; but she is a wonder to these Indians, and when she occasionally steams past, they seem to realize that there is a power which could be brought to bear on them which they could not resist. When they visit Hermosillo, they always travel in squads, and sell bows and arrows and singing birds, and steal what they can.

"Their nearest neighbors among the aborigines are the Cahuillas, of Lower California; the Cowpohs, of Lower Colorado, and the Yaquis, of Southern Sonora, but to these they bear no resemblance. They are different in contour of the face and head; in size they are smaller, and in cleanliness, industry and intellect they are not to be compared, and their language is totally different. On the island they are most inhospitable, and show it plainly. When parties are not strong enough to inspire respect they will not be permitted to land at all, and I have heard of several cases in the last ten years of the their murdering shipwrecked sailors who had sought refuge on their shores. As they are extremely treacherous and use poisoned arrows for weapons, whose slightest scratch means a horrible death, the Mexicans leave them severely alone. Private individuals have no business relations with them, and Government officials can make nothing out of them. As they have ceased their raids into Sonora the authorities do not bother their heads aobut them, and the priests many years ago gave up all hope of converting them to Catholicism. The last vessel which touched at Tiburon was the English man-of-war Daphne, which was used in a survey of the Gulf in 1881, but none of those on board, after a very brief experience, felt like making further investigations.

"In former times the Ceris were in the habit of making trips as far down as the environs of Guaymas, and they would steal whatever came in their way, from a cow or a steer to a burro or a goat, a horse or a mule to a dog or a cat, and would eat their booty. They got the reputation of being cannibals, if the occasion offered, and would kidnap children boldly. In this manner a number of little ones were stolen from their parents during the years that passed before the savages were cowed, and their fate can only be surmised. However, the mystery that surrounded the stealing of a little girl whose relatives still live in Guaymas was explained a few years ago. The child was the daughter of a Mexican family named Casanova, and I think it was in 1860 that she disappeared. A thorough search was made for her, but no trace was discovered of what had become of her, and it was only suspected that she had been stolen by the Ceris. Some eight or ten years ago a Frenchman named Joseph went on an abalone fishing expedition in the Gulf with a number of associates on board of a schooner. By the way, this Joseph had a curious history. He had come to Sonora with the Marquis de Pendiay, and had managed to ingratiate himself with the Mexicans and so saved his life when that noble filibuster's expedition ended disastrously. The vessel happened to become becalmed off Tiburon and some of the Indians came out in their canoes for the purpose of trading for tobacco or corn.

"As they appeared to be peaceful and were not in sufficient numbers to be dangerous, Joseph invited a few of them on board. Among the visitors was a squaw who spoke some Spanish, and she acted as an interpreter. Joseph, while talking with her, thought that through its coating of dirt her skin showed a lighter hue than that of her companions. Her hair was not so coarse and her features were not uncomely. He entered into conversation with her and was surprised when she told him that she was from the coast, 'mujer de razon,' as she said. She knew that she had been stolen from her parents by the Indians, but who her people were she had forgotten. By dint of questioning he learned enough to assure himself that she had lived at Guaymas and that she was the child whose disappearance had for so many years remained a mystery. His sympathy was aroused and he offered to rescue her, take her on board of his vessel and restore her to her family. But, to his surprise, she absolutely declined. She had become, to all intents and purposes, a Ceris Indian. She told him that she cared no longer for her people. She had lived on the island so long that she knew no other home or no other people. All attempts to rouse her interest in her mother or her sisters was fruitless. She had merged into the Indian life and had become in full sympathy with her captors. Furthermore she was married, as far as marriage goes with those Indians, and was the wife, or rather the property, of a medicine man of the tribe, who was also a chief. She had children and felt quite contented with her life. All Joseph's efforts to change her mind were of no avail, and Joseph gave up the attempt. She remained steadfast in her resolution. Before leaving the vessel she warned the Frenchman to keep good guard, and, above all, to make no attempt to land or allow any of his companions to do so, as they would surely be overcome and killed.

"When Joseph returned to Guaymas he told this remarkable story to many people, including the Casanovas, but no steps were ever taken to rescue the willing captive, and she is probably now at Tiburon, if still alive. Ten years ago she was reported as being in good health. The Indians are dying out rapidly, and in a few decades will probably have disappeared from their island forever."